

## After All These Years by thegirlcourageous

**Series:** [Reddie or Not: 31 Days of Fic \(In honor of Christmas\) \[2\]](#)

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**Summary:**

Eddie had always loved Richie. He'd just forgotten. But he wasn't going to waste his second chance.

## After All These Years

Many things had changed in just a few short days.

Most notable of all, Eddie had almost died. Looking back, he couldn't quite understand how he had survived. Then again, his memories after having been stabbed by that fucking crazy clown had been a fuzzy mess of jumbled images and sounds at best, and incomprehensible garbage at worst.

Obviously, he'd gotten out. Somehow. After all, he was still here. He hadn't kicked the bucket yet.

Later, he'd learned that he had his friends to thank for that. But specifically, Richie. Yes, they'd all helped carry his heavy, lifeless body to safety, but it had been Richie that had insisted that they had to try. Even if it was too late. That they needed to try, or he'd never forgive himself or the others. And they had listened.

And they were all relieved that they had. They'd all told him so, everyone taking turns to grip his hands tightly and tell him that they were sorry, looking as if they were all trying to convince themselves that he was really there. That he was alive. None of them had ever seen that much blood in their lives, and they'd been so scared that he'd lost too much blood. His shirt had apparently been soaked through, his skin wet and slippery.

Eddie hadn't known what to say to any of that, so, instead his eyes had kept trying to seek out Richie's, but the other had been staring intently at the door. Uncharacteristically quiet for once. Eddie really wished he'd say something. He missed hearing him speak.

It wasn't until later that evening when the nurse had come to kick the Loser's out of his hospital room because they'd been there for *far* too long and the patient needed to rest, and his friends were slowly shuffling out of the room, that Richie finally spoke. He was standing in the doorway, one foot literally out the door. He didn't turn around but Eddie heard him anyway.

"Where is she?"

Eddie had blinked at him, unsure of who Richie was speaking of.

When he didn't get an answer, Richie glanced back at him, raised an eyebrow and said, "Your wife?"

"Oh."

"Yeah. Oh." Richie agreed.

"She's not going to come here." Eddie said. He wasn't sure why Richie was asking him about her. Though, in his defense, he was on some pretty heavy medication. One kind of had to be if they'd been stabbed and had a fucking hole in their chest that had been operated on and was trying to slowly heal.

At this new piece of information Richie turned around fully to face him.

“What do you mean she’s not coming here?” He asked, the incredulity obvious in his voice.

“I meant what I said.”

“Yes, but what does that even mean!” Richie threw his hands up in exasperation, almost yelling the words at him.

Eddie’s brow furrowed. What about what he’d said didn’t make sense? Myra wasn’t ever coming to the hospital because before he’d even gotten to Derry, before he’d remembered everything, he’d known that he didn’t trust her.

And in an act that had surprised even himself, because if there was one thing Eddie Kaspbrak hadn’t been known to be it was spontaneous, he’d removed her as his emergency contact.

He’d had enough forethought to know that things might go terribly wrong once he got back to his hometown, and he hadn’t wanted her there. Wouldn’t have been able to handle her overbearing behavior disguised as caring.

Obviously, he been proved right.

And of course, then he’d seen Richie Tozier for the first time in 27 years and he’d been doubly relieved. He certainly didn’t want his

wife, the wife that he never would have married in the first place if he hadn't forgotten, hadn't been forced to forget, to meet the Losers. But more than anything, he especially hadn't wanted her anywhere near Richie.

"She's not my emergency contact." Eddie replied simply. He didn't really have the energy to explain further.

Richie continued to stare at him as if he'd grown a third eye or a second head, looking as if this in no way answered his question in the slightest.

"Why—" Richie began, then pinched the bridge of his nose, and closed his eyes, exhaling roughly before asking, "Why isn't she? I thought..."

Eddie leaned forward as far as he could reach, which admittedly wasn't very far, as he his chest twinged painfully whenever he moved. He lowered his voice, as if he was telling some damning secret and he didn't want anyone to hear, "I don't trust her."

This was apparently news to Richie, if the shocked look on his face was anything to go by.

Eddie giggled, almost missing the dazed look on Richie's face at the sound. But before he could comment, Richie plodded over to one of the chairs placed around Eddie's bed, and fell into it. Eddie was pleased to note that it was the chair closest to him.

Richie sat in silence for a couple of minutes, and Eddie spent those peaceful minutes staring unabashedly at the other man. The longer he'd been in Derry, the more he remembered. All those stolen glances. All those times he'd almost confessed that he saw Richie as more than just his best friend, only for the words to get caught in his throat.

Things wouldn't be like that this time. He'd had enough of keeping quiet, of having to look away quickly if he ever got caught. And he wouldn't do it anymore. That he was promising himself.

Almost dying put things into perspective. He'd gotten a second chance at life. He wasn't going to waste it.

"You don't trust her?" Richie asked, looking very apprehensive. But underneath that, he looked very pale.

"No. But I trust you." Eddie frowned. He hadn't meant to say that last part. Not that he regretted it, or it had been a lie. Just, he hadn't planned to be quite so forthcoming with Richie. Well, not yet anyway. Preferably, once he was out of the hospital.

Richie flushed, and scratched at the hair at the back of his head. Eddie watched as pushed up his glasses on his nose. Remembered watching him do that too when they were kids. A nervous tick that had apparently survived into adulthood.

And Eddie loved that. That the young boy he once knew, that he'd adored, hadn't changed too much in the years they'd spent apart.

“Ok, let me get this straight.” Richie looked at Eddie, and Eddie nodded. He would answer any question that Richie asked him.

“Your wife isn’t coming?” Richie asked.

Eddie nodded.

“Because you don’t trust her?”

Eddie nodded again.

“This is so fucked up,” Richie muttered to himself, and Eddie couldn’t help but agree.

“So, nobody’s coming for you?”

Eddie shook his head, and couldn’t help but add, “You’re here.”

At this, Richie raised his eyes and met Eddie’s stare. Eddie hadn’t looked away once. Not for even one second.

Richie broke the eye contact, and gulped audibly, and said, sounding rather nervous, “Right...” He followed this up with rubbing the palms

of his hand on his jeans.

Eddie just continued to stare, to drink in the man before him. He'd never allowed himself to do this before, and Eddie wasn't going to miss a second by looking at something that wasn't Richie. Life was too short to lie to himself. Life was too short to not look at his favorite person.

And without stopping to think about it, Eddie said out loud just as he was thinking in that moment, "I want to look at you all the time."

Richie's cheeks grew ever redder, and Eddie couldn't help but want to reach out and touch. But Richie was too far away, and Eddie's arm was too heavy to lift that far up.

"Are you alright Eddie? You can't possibly mean that." Richie was deflecting, and then, just like Eddie knew he would, Richie cracked a joke about his looks. Or, from his point of view, his lack of looks. "You can't mean this old, ugly mug?" He'd even used one of his godawful accents. And the smile that he shot towards Eddie had too many teeth, reminding Eddie more of grimace than anything else.

Eddie reached out, taking Richie's hand. By some miracle, it was close enough that he could actually reach it. Yes, the movement made his chest hurt, but even breathing hurt at the moment, so he ignored it. He moved his thumb over the top of Richie's hand in what he hoped was a soothing gesture. Richie's eyes were following the movement of his thumb as if transfixed.

Something had shifted inside of Eddie, and it left him wanting to be



more honest in his life than he'd ever been before. And he said something he'd been thinking for a very long time.

"I think you're beautiful."

Richie stilled, breathing shallowly.

"What the fuck?" He whispered to no one in particular.

"I think you're beautiful." Eddie repeated. "So, don't joke about... your face like that. I really, really like your face. It's your face. It's the face of my most favorite person in, like, the world."

Richie was gripping his hand hard. His mouth kept opening and closing, as if he was trying to figure out what to say.

"You're not allowed to argue with me, just by the by, asshole."

This startled a laugh out of Richie.

"I don't...understand...what's going on..." Richie said.

Eddie couldn't help chuckling at the confused expression on the other man's face.

“Richie, look at me.”

Richie didn't look at him.

“Please.” He whined.

Reluctantly, as if he was unable to really refuse Eddie anything, Richie's eyes meet Eddie's.

Eddie squeezed the hand he was still holding. It was now or never.

“Rich...” Ok, maybe it was harder to get the words out than he had accounted for.

“I...I love you. No wait, what I meant is that I'm in love with you. Or, I'm still in love with you. Depending on how you look at it.” Eddie frowned at the inelegant way he'd phrased that.

The tight grip was back, but this time, tears were streaming down Richie's face.

“You do? You are?” He could hardly get the words out, his voice already sounding thick from the tears.

“Yes.” There was no point in saying anything else. If there was one thing Eddie knew for sure, it was that he loved Richie.

“Holy shit!” Richie yelled. He used his free hand to roughly wipe away the tears, and then cleared his throat, “Ditto! Uh, me too. That is, I love you too. Am in love with you. Have been forever.”

It was as if a thousand butterflies had suddenly erupted in his stomach, but it wasn't a bad feeling. Not like when he was scared and anxious. No, this sensation just made him feel warm. So unbelievably warm.

He lowered his head to bed, and the words seemed to rush out of him, “Fuck, I'm so glad you didn't die. I was always too scared to say anything, and then when I almost lost you, I was so scared that I'd never be able to say anything at all. I couldn't stop thinking, what if Eddie doesn't wake up? What if I'd tried to save you and it wasn't enough? Eddie, Jesus fucking Christ, I've never been that scared in my life. The moment you're feeling even a little bit better we're getting the hell away from this town. You, me, the other Losers. We're all going to go far, far away, and all of us are going to be happy and free and together away from that freaking asshole clown.”

And then the sobbing started. Eddie knew exactly how he was feeling. Eddie's hand found its way to Richie's hair as if it had moved on its own volition, which it might as well have. And Eddie certainly wasn't going to deny himself touching the man he loved, and who loved him return. Shit. He almost couldn't believe it. But he was choosing to believe it. It was everything he'd wanted.

And he could finally have it.

So, instead of questioning anything, his hand began stroking Richie's hair tenderly, trying to focus on helping him calm down.

Then, as if he couldn't physically hold the words back, Eddie said, "You were the best part of coming back here. You have always been the best part."

Richie's sobs quieted but didn't stop. He just pushed his head closer to the Eddie's leg, leaning into Eddie's touch.

A gentle smile tugged at Eddie's lips. He was in love with an idiot. A very cute idiot.

He was finally where he wanted to be. There was no way in hell he was going back to New York, and the life that he'd left behind there that had always screamed *wrong wrong wrong* to him. But he'd always been too afraid to leave. Too afraid to try again. Convinced himself that he was too old to start over, too old...to hope for love. Too scared to try and fail.

He gazed down at the crown of Richie's head. Now, that he'd found him again, Eddie wasn't going to waste any more time. They'd lost too much time to begin with. As soon as he possibly could, he'd was going to divorce Myra. It was the right thing to do. It was the only thing he could do. He was hopelessly in love with his best friend. He couldn't be married to someone else.

Because, well, if Eddie had anything to say about it, and he would

make sure that he did, he'd choose to spend every day with Richie. After all these years, that one thing hadn't changed. Together, always and forever.

Eddie smiled.

Richie would definitely freak out when he proposed. His real life was about to begin, and Eddie couldn't wait.

### **Author's Note:**

Day 2 completed. Let's see how long I can keep this up.